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R 280009Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3920  
INFO RUEHRG/AMCONSUL RECIFE 9284  
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 7479  
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 3778  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

S E C R E T BRASILIA 000390

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/BSC AND L

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/27/2019

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [BR](#)

SUBJECT: THEFT OF SMALL PLANE ACTIVATES SHOOTDOWN PROCEDURES

REF: A. 08 BRASILIA 1170  
[1](#)B. IIR 6 809 0120 09  
[1](#)C. 08 BRASILIA 1214

Classified By: DCM Lisa Kubiske. Reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Ref B describes a March 12 incident in which a small private aircraft was stolen at gunpoint in Luziania (approximately 23 miles from Brasilia) and after two hours was intentionally crashed into a parking lot of a shopping mall in Goiania, approximately 90 miles from Brasilia. The incident was notable in that it provoked a rare activation of Brazil's shutdown procedures (described in ref a). Given the plane's proximity to the federal capital and lack of any flight plan, Brasilia Air Traffic Control notified Air Defense Control, which scrambled planes from Anapolis Air Base to intercept, observe and try to communicate (details in ref b). When the plane suddenly steered for a densely populated area and a large shopping mall, controllers began to view it as a threat. With the possibility that the stolen plane could be used as a weapon, Air Defense Command briefed Air Force Chief Brigadeiro Junito Saito. Saito then contacted Defense Minister Jobim and President Lula about the possibility of ordering a shutdown should there be a threat to civilians. During the discussion, the pilot went down in the mall parking lot.

[1](#)2. (C) COMMENT: The Brazilian Air Force followed exactly the procedures provided to Embassy Brasilia last year in going up the chain of command before authorizing a shutdown. Because of the seriousness of a potential threat to a large number of citizens in the mall, the Air Force took the additional step of consulting with the President. While no decision was made before the plane crashed, the procedure followed illustrates the extreme caution with which a possible shutdown is approached, the broad understanding of the shutdown policy among air traffic controllers and the fact that the procedures are executed as written. Mission believes that the March 12 incident provides an illustration of the effectiveness of Brazil's procedures to prevent inadvertent shutdowns that were the basis of the recommendation for Presidential certification of Brazil in ref c. The fact that the procedures were correctly followed on March 12 demonstrates that they remain well known to pilots, controllers and decision makers. Along with the absence of any indication that conditions have changed with regard to shutdowns, this incident provides a strong case for recertification later this year.

[1](#)3. (S/NF) COMMENT, CONTINUED: On the other side of the coin, the deliberate approach to a shutdown decision highlighted a vulnerability to potential terrorist actions given that a decision would not have been made in time to stop the pilot had he been able to crash into his target or another

building, including in Brasilia. In part, this vulnerability stems from Brazil's shootdown procedures having been developed to apply to drug smuggling aircraft in Brazil's vast northern areas, not to potential attacks on cities. Based on DAO discussion with the Brazilian Air Force and Air Traffic control, the Brazilians consider their shootdown procedures to be effective but may look at ways to accelerate decision making during a potential terrorist attack.

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